

PROMOTING RESILIENCY: A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH  
CURRICULUM FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

By

Anne Madore, BED, BSN

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APPROVED:

Susan Renes, Ph.D., Committee Chair  
Valerie Gifford, Ph.D., Committee Co-Chair  
Joni Simpson, M.Ed., Committee Member  
Cindy Fabbri, Ph.D., Chair  
*School of Education Graduate Program*

### Abstract

In this paper, literature was examined in order to identify how to meet the needs of adolescents through the recognition of their emotions and personal strengths, allowing them to build resiliency skills and promote positive mental health. The strength-based curriculum developed as the result of this literature review, includes several mental health approaches supported by counseling theories that can help high school students achieve success academically, psychologically, and socially. The path to success can potentially be accomplished when adolescents have found their identities and have learned ways to respond to challenges. The implementation of the person-centered and solution-focused therapeutic interventions can result in positive ways to deal with difficulties, by developing personal relationships with others and providing encouragement, motivation, and stability in adolescents' lives. Furthermore, with additional skills, such as coping techniques, self-talk, stress management, mindfulness, and additional resources, resiliency and positive mental health can develop when youth have acquired a sense of empowerment and a confident attitude. It is important not to forget the assistance of a team approach, as well as the support and cooperation of young people's environment.

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### Promoting Resiliency: A Strength-Based Approach Curriculum for High School Students

Fostering resiliency in adolescents using strength-based approaches is important due to the difficulties adolescents experience when dealing with problems and effectively adapting to changes when their personal comfort zones have been altered (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011). The needs of adolescents should not be overlooked due to the challenges they must deal with every day. Some youth experience additional challenges that are uncontrollable, but they can become resilient by developing positive mental health with the help of a strength-based curriculum. Following a strength -based curriculum is an approach that is seen as positive and one that motivates students to succeed. Success can occur when youth believe in themselves, have hope, and look for opportunities and solutions instead of looking at problems (Cahill, Beadle, Farrell, Forster & Smith, 2014; Resiliency Initiatives, 2011).

Students' families can be so stressed that problems often develop beyond students' abilities to manage these problems successfully. Some adolescents live with family problems that lead to divorce. Others live with only one parent, while still others may be experiencing poverty, domestic violence, substance abuse, eating disorders, depression and thoughts of suicide. Not all students are equipped to deal with emotional difficulties and changes in their lives. All of these challenges affect a student's development and his or her learning environment (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009). Students might be unable to develop resiliency due to the stress, neglect and difficulties they are experiencing in their relationships with others. Often, these students get discouraged and decide to give up because they believe they are incapable of accomplishing anything (Rodgers & Dunsmuir, 2015).

Some adolescents are overprotected by parents, preventing them from making major decisions or making any mistakes; therefore they are unable to learn from those mistakes (Ungar,

2009). Others have little support due to “barriers” such as the parents’ lack of (a) employment, (b) transportation, (c) education, (d) fair treatment, or (f) speaking a minimum amount of English (Taub, 2006). To prevent behavioral problems from occurring and to meet the needs of students, interventions could be implemented in the school setting for students and their parents. This is especially true for students who are being raised by parents who are substance abusers and/or students who live in poverty. However, these students are often resilient unless there is abuse and neglect at school, at home, or in their communities (Sink, & Edwards, 2008). It is important for counseling professionals to provide encouragement and use strength-based models with these students to develop motivation and hope. Individual strengths must be acknowledged and applied at school, at home, and in the community, so students can reach desired goals that can lead to positive mental health (Scheel, Davis, & Henderson, 2012).

Parents must also acknowledge their child’s strengths and ways of learning. Youth are trying to cope by finding ways to release pressure and stress from their environment and the expectations placed upon them (Garish & Wilson, 2010). Their coping measures may include acting out to get someone’s attention. Some youth seem to believe that self-harm (such as cutting) is helpful to release stress and the self-harm often serves as personal punishment (Garish & Wilson, 2010; Xavier, Cunha, & Pinto-Gouveia, 2016). Others have had suicidal thoughts or have attempted suicide, while yet others have exhibited aggressive behavior or become introverted, have lost courage, or have dropped out of school (Thornton & Sanchez, 2010). Parents, with the help of professionals, need to have hope and have a plan to teach students about coping, in order to help them respond to the challenges in their environment (Sink & Edwards, 2008).

Professionals such as counselors, teachers, and principals, along with parents, must not

focus on weaknesses but implement strength-based approaches that help increase the self-esteem and self-confidence of youth, in order for these youth to accomplish something and feel successful (Sink & Edwards, 2008). Cooperation between the students and their parents is certainly the first step to support student adaptations to personal, academic, and environmental changes, as well as the development of healthy relationships with others. The education system can remain involved and make a difference by meeting the needs of students in various ways (Sink & Edwards, 2008). There are ways to determine if students in secondary schools are learning appropriately. This can be done through observations, oral tests, written tests, and also with formative assessment (OECD, 2005; Scholar Centric, 2016). The formative assessment can identify learning needs of students and respond to their needs, as well as determining how well secondary schools students are learning in the classroom. What teachers are actually assessing is collecting information on students understanding in order to make changes in their teaching methods to meet the needs of students. Teachers can also help students to develop skills, allowing them to learn in different ways so they can reach their goals. There are eight countries that have adapted this assessment to change the ways people learn in the school system: Australia, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Italy, New Zealand and Scotland (OECD, 2005). The benefits of formative assessments are that it has increased students' ability to accomplish tasks and to learn. It has also provided assets and resources to students, not only to improve academics, but to help students that are below average academically. Student's presence in the classroom and quality of work have increased their skills and understanding. Many schools have found the way for students to become successful by identifying students and providing assistance (OECD, 2005).

Basically teachers have changed the culture of their classrooms by connecting with

students individually and in a group, building self-esteem and helping students to assess their own work, as well as giving student results verbally and in writing. Examples of formative assessment surveys are available to review on several subjects such as the importance of school, confidence, connections, stress, well-being and motivation (Scholar Centric, 2016). All of these questionnaires are affiliated with ways to promote resiliency and has shown great success. The results has showned an elevated great point average by 23 percent, an increase of 19 percent of students passing additional classes, 17 percent with additional credits and 9percent increase of attendance in the classroom (Scholar Centric, 2016 & Scholar, 2013).

### **Description of Need**

There are mental health needs and concerns for resiliency existing among a large population of youth in the school system. Observations and communication with students have been a great start to collecting data for the province of New Brunswick and throughout Canada, as well as United States and around the world. A curriculum based on promoting resiliency could be implemented in New Brunswick at the District office so that professionals can use the curriculum and help teachers understand students' needs and teach them about the challenges the students have to deal with every day. At risk youth must learn to deal with emotional pain due to their unstable situations and people in their environments (White & Waters, 2014).

Adolescents have emotional pain when experiencing bullying, domestic violence, substance abuse, depression, self-harm, low self-esteem, and discrimination. In addition, when youth live in poverty, they can potentially develop mental health problems, leading them to attempt or even commit suicide (Girls Action Foundation, 2013). There is a lot of pressure on teenagers when living in poverty. They may drop out of school because they are often being bullied and often hungry, making it difficult to learn; or they might have to work so the family

does not end up in a homeless shelter. According to the Human Development Council (2014), 14.3 % of people living in the province of New Brunswick are living in poverty with 25% of children and youth having a limited amount of food to eat. In 2012, Food Banks Canada published that 19,524 individuals were provided with meals and 32% of those who were provided with meals were children (Human Development Council, 2014). Other urgent problems to consider are suicide attempts, which is the second leading cause of death in youth between the ages of 10 to 19 years old in New Brunswick, Canada. Around the world there are 800,000 individuals who die of suicide every year (Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 2016).

It is known that in Atlantic Canada females are three to four times more likely to be hospitalized for suicidal attempts, but that death by suicide in males is four times higher than in females (Lathan, 2012). Suicide in Canada represents 24 % of all deaths of teenagers and suicidal thoughts can happen as young as 8 years old (Centre for Suicide Prevention, 2015). Statistics Canada reported that in 2012 there were 3,926 deaths by suicide in that year alone. There are also two adolescents who die every day due to suicide and there are another 173,000 who will attempt suicide. Statistics show that approximately 90% of teens that die of suicide have a mental illness (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2014). According to the New Brunswick Department of Health (2016), one in seven Canadians (14%) with mental problems have utilized mental health services for several disorders, 1 in 10 for anxiety, 1 in 5 for substance abuse, 1 in 8 for depression.

Mental illness has been the cause of many negative behaviors that get out of control due to a lack of resiliency and adequate coping measures (Rodgers & Dunsmuir, 2015). This research project was developed to promote ways that adolescents can be better assisted in achieving positive mental health using a strength-based model. Additional factors addressed are

environmental stressors, behavior problems, and the development of coping strategies. In order to support youth and to meet their needs, interventions, directions, and connections are needed from parents, professionals and from the community. To make this possible for youth, everyone must work together by promoting positive mental health, which can be assisted by the implementation of a curriculum that will address ways to build skills using a strength-based approach (Lavoie, Mancuso, & Bourque, 2015). A curriculum that will support and motivate students to strive towards their future goals is a helpful tool (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011).

It is valuable to understand adolescent development, both the changes that occur in the body physically and emotionally (Rodgers & Dunsmuir, 2015). These changes can affect their relationships with peers, family members, school professionals and other individuals in the environment. Adolescence is often a difficult time for students because they have to adapt to both developmental changes and changes in their environment. We must also comprehend the importance of educating youth on the social changes that can occur, while having to deal with stigma that youth may be experiencing while having no skills or support to overcome negative attitudes of others and possible discrimination (Teen Mental Health, 2015). These changes may be difficult, especially for students with mental health issues. Many individuals do not attempt to get the help they need due to stigma and the fear they will be labeled as being mentally ill (Rodgers & Dunsmuir, 2015). Many problems become unmanageable when adolescents have no skills to build resiliency for all the struggles they face and need to manage. This is why the school counselor needs to decrease social barriers that prevent youth from achieving personal goals and social development (Dahir, 2009).

According to Zimmerman (2013), the resiliency theory describes positive aspects of development and the effectiveness of strength-based approaches as a way to understand why

some youth become healthy individuals no matter what the circumstances. The positive aspects are known as “promotive factors” (assets and resources) which function to defeat at risk circumstances and prevent negative outcomes. The “assets” are positive influences inside individuals such as self-esteem and self-efficacy and resources are factors outside individuals, such as parental support, adults mentors, and youth programs, which provide opportunities to learn and practice skills” (Zimmerman, 2013, p. 381).

By incorporating a strength-based model with at risk students, a professional can help students utilize their inner strength and adapt to changes (Thornton & Sanchez, 2010). This model can further guide students in controlling and managing their behaviors and can give them confidence to pursue anything they have difficulties with (Thornton & Sanchez, 2010). Thus, adolescents often move into practicing coping measures without over-reacting. Youth will learn the skills of using a positive attitude, finding balance, feeling competent, and finding inner peace.

Research has shown that youth can overcome challenges when they are given the required support through caring relationships, coping skills, and high expectations (Oregon Department of Education, 2000; Resiliency Initiatives, 2011). Therefore, adolescents can become successful adults regardless of risky environments. However, these aspects cannot be accomplished without looking closely at a “strength-based paradigm”, involving both deficit-based and strength-based approaches (Resiliency, 2011, p. 2).

When comparing both deficit-based and strength-based approaches, professionals need to recognize what is happening to students (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011). When choosing to work on deficits with students, controlling their problems or trying to fix their problems is one way of accepting their deficits. However, when applying a strength-based approach, students’ and professionals’ ways of thinking and behaving become positive because the concentration is on

the individual's potential. It empowers students by allowing time for support, understanding, and giving them opportunities by recognizing and building on strengths, instead of being rigid, diagnosing, and labeling youth (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011).

### **Purpose**

This purpose of this project is not only to reach youth but to open doors to parents and professionals who are interested in helping students to thrive by exploring their strengths, controlling their difficulties, and helping them respond to changes in their environment. Professionals who can participate in making changes in the lives of adolescents are counselors, teachers, school district personnel, and professionals in the community.

The support of parents and professionals can assist adolescents as they develop positive mental health (Sheely, 2010; Smith Harvey, 2013; Ungar, 2009). This can help and encourage youth to transfer their attention from specific problems to a positive approach, as they look for opportunities and focus on individual strengths to meet their needs. It is by meeting their needs that changes can occur and their beliefs will become more positive. From this aspect adolescents can move away from risky behaviors to resilient ways of thinking. It is through positive thinking that adolescents will develop and learn self-efficacy and social-emotional learning, experience positive development (strength-focused), and use protective factors for major challenges they have to deal with every day.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Theoretical Framework**

As children become adolescents and grow into adulthood, they need a positive outlook to accept challenges and learn their strengths so they can cope with these challenges. Youth also need an environment they can depend on for support and safety, and they need people who are



warm and accepting, peaceful and nurturing, in order to develop life-skills, self-worth and resiliency (Anuradha, Yagnnik, & Sharma, 2012; Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009; Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario, 2016). Resiliency theory and a strength-based approach have been popular in many schools, teaching students how to be strong and basically survive the behavioral and emotional struggles they are experiencing every year (Anuradha et al., 2012). As professionals it is not possible to predict who is at risk; therefore schools are ideal places to promote resiliency where there are people that understand and have the skills to make a difference in the lives of youth.

**Resiliency theory.** What is resiliency? The concept of resiliency is known as protecting youth from the unfavorable results of exposure to major difficulties and then having the strength to fight back when something becomes challenging (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009; Smith Harvey, 2013; Zimmerman, 2013). This theoretical model supports seeking effective solutions by empowering youth to make appropriate behavioral choices and encouraging them to build strengths to deal with self-harm, anxiety, bullying, poverty, trauma, and dilemmas that are being experienced in their environments (Rogers & Dunsmuir, 2015; Xavier et al., 2016; Zimmerman, 2013). Resiliency theory includes many models that protect youth from negative encounters and risky behaviors. These models include the “compensatory, protective factor, and the challenge models of resiliency” (Zimmerman, 2013, p. 382). The compensatory model uses positive factors to balance the effects of risk factors; in other words, it protects against risks. The protective factors decrease the interactions with risk factors. These factors include both assets and resources. As described earlier, the individual assets are internal strengths such as coping behaviors, accepting self, feeling competent, and being a good communicator. The resources involved are external and come from parental support, interactions with peers and community

organizations. The challenge model factors overcome the adverse consequences of the risks. In other words, if adolescents are exposed to moderate levels of risk, they can overcome them and the more often they are exposed to moderate risks, the better they can deal with serious risks (Bernier, Mukai, Sinauskas, & Wikum, 2014).

When developing resilient students, creating skills, values, and readiness to make changes must be taken into consideration. Sometimes there is a need to discover what works, imagine what can work and realize that everyone has the potential to change; therefore a plan for a curriculum needs to be implemented, incorporating a strength-based model (Oregon Department of Education, 2000). As adults, we need to nurture youth and keep them connected to positive individuals and institutions that acknowledge friendship and offer a caring attitude (belonging), competence and expectations (optimism), safety and coping from strengths (empowerment), staying engaged (communication), and believing that things will get better (hopefulness). These factors can lead to youth making a positive connection to a school that treats them with fairness, facilitates trust, and treats them as part of a family unit (Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario, 2016; Oregon Department of Education, 2000).

Other issues to consider are strength-based techniques such as the person-centered therapy, solution-focused therapy, coping techniques, mindfulness, shorter instructions, and caring attitudes from professionals who can work with youth without labeling them due to their experiences, culture, or background. What this is really suggesting is to promote positive parent and peer relationships, and develop a caring relationship with teachers and other professionals who are involved with the students, including the community at large (Barnes, 2013; Oregon Department of Education, 2000).

Furthermore, adolescents must be encouraged to be involved in curricular activities inside

and outside of school, as well as summer programs. This has been known to have positive effects towards improving concentration, promoting changes in behaviors, feeling connected to peers, keeping commitments, and being motivated in what these adolescents undertake (Oregon Department of Education, 2000). From these components, students can have a closer relationship with the people they are involved with such as peers, teachers, coaches and mentors.

Support groups and a mentorship program can be developed through volunteers and retired personnel who want to dedicate themselves to helping youth take control of their academics, emotional and social well-being, as well as adapting to situations through the recognition of their strengths, cooperation, and finding proper solutions to their challenges. Other programs that students can be involved in are study skills, tutoring on reading comprehension, writing, mathematics, projects, wellness programs, sports, arts, delivering acts of kindness, life skills, and participating in decision-making in the schools, at home, and in the community (Davidson, 2014; Oregon Department of Education, 2000).

What seems to be the key element to promote positive health is for youth to have stability in their lives, accept changes that are out of their control, and look forward to other positive things. These factors can be promoted by parents through unconditional love, encouragement, offering advice, and setting limits to provide an environment that has positive relationships within the family unit (Mental Health, 2010). Some examples of this are having a positive experience living in a place without fear where there are positive alternatives, such as participating in activities, laughing and making connections with family members, neighbors, and the community, which can increase students' confidence and help them cope appropriately with barriers that they experience every day.

**Strength-based approaches.** What is a strength-based practice and why is it so

important to apply it in our schools? A strength-based approach is a positive way to help students recognize their strengths, their potential, and help them find ways to overcome their challenges. Everyone has strengths they can benefit from and these strengths can be used as advantages (assets) to deal with conflicts and concentrate on solutions (Centre for Child Well-Being, 2011). It is a good idea to incorporate strength-based approaches into schools so that adolescents can have opportunities to grow as individuals. Youth are more likely to have better outcomes when they are empowered, resourceful, and able to make decisions, make changes, and cope appropriately with the problems they are experiencing in their lives (Brownlee, Rawana & MacArthur, 2012). The strength-based model is about making choices to believe in strengths instead of weaknesses and assets over deficits in order to develop and reach positive mental health in their environment where they learn, play and work hard to accomplish tasks (Pattoni, 2012; Resiliency, 2011). Strength-based approaches are used so that youth develop their own goals, are supported by many resources in the school and in the community, and are based on counseling therapies in order to improve hope with the help of a trusting relationship with parents and others.

There are different types of approaches that can make a difference in developing assets, capacity, personal relationships, community involvement, and positive youth engagement. Resiliency can be applied with the person-centered therapy, solution-focused therapy, mindfulness and other coping strategies such as using personal strengths, positive thinking, coping skills, self-talk, stress management and breathing techniques, as well as relying on connections with peers, parents and professionals. All of these approaches can be accomplished without labeling students, looking at negative patterns, putting energy on impossibilities, and failing to recognize the potentials, which can lead to limitations of self and finding few solutions.

***Methodical model.*** In 2012, Brownlee and colleagues described a “methodical framework” that has been put together for utilizing a strength-based perspective in education. This framework supports academic learning and has helped students in the classroom. A teacher can apply this approach as early as grade 6. Following this framework, children’s needs are assessed and a model is developed to help students individually and during group sessions (Brownlee, 2012). The use of strength-based principles is utilized for every student, whether they are at risk or not. Positive results are promoted in the school through the involvement of instructors who care and who help students to feel good about themselves (Brownlee, 2012). Professionals in an “elementary school in northwestern Ontario” developed this framework (Brownlee, 2012, p. 4). The strength model was developed believing that children and their loved ones (families) have strong influences over everything they undertake every day.

When professionals in the class applied the stages in the methodical framework, positive teaching and success occurred for students in their learning classroom and in the entire school. The stages involved were “engagement” (the teacher works to have a positive bond with students and others involved with them and works on tasks they thrive in), “exploration” (an assessment of strengths is done using a questionnaire such as the strengths assessment inventory and is completed by several people affiliated with students at school, at home, and in the community), “expansion” (students have learned what their strengths are and how to use them) and “evolution” (educators test students abilities to utilize their strengths appropriately, to deal with challenges and to increase resiliency) (Brownlee, 2012, pp. 4-8).

***Value-In-Action system.*** According to White and Waters (2014), a strength-based approach was applied in Australia in a K-12 private school with a population of 1299 males to assess Christopher Peterson’s research. Peterson is one of the many researchers working in

positive psychology. His research has been established in schools in five areas through a “Value-In-Action (VAI) system”, affecting the growth of positive psychological interventions in educational settings (White & Waters, 2014, p. 69).

Students at St-Peter’s College enrolled in both daytime school and boarding school were involved in learning the five areas of character strengths. The five areas contained “the English curriculum, school sport, student leadership, counseling and the most recent curriculum of Positive Education”; the progress of students was evaluated after using their strengths in their learning environment (White & Waters, 2014, p. 69). The VAI-Action system was developed to find individual strengths in different areas of learning in order to develop growth in youth. The VAI-Action system involves six categories and twenty four characteristics used to determine the character strengths of students and professionals:

- humanity: love, kindness, and social intelligence
- wisdom and knowledge: creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, and perspective
- temperance: forgiveness, self-regulation, prudence, and humility
- transcendence: hope, humor, gratitude, spirituality, and appreciation of beauty and excellence
- justice: leadership, fairness, citizenship; and courage: zest, bravery and perseverance

This was implemented as a strength-based approach and to find out who would be interested to work with the strengths of youth. After three years of this study, the evaluation of character strengths showed positive results for both students and professionals in term of developing positive character strengths, changing students attitudes, and the ways they communicate with each other (White & Waters, 2014).

### **Therapeutic Practices**

Certain therapeutic practices are being implemented due to the success rate they have had among high school students in and of the classroom. From these three practices, resiliency was experienced in a non-judgmental way to adapt to challenges and to find balance.

**Person-Centered therapy.** The person-centered therapy is a non-directive practice that has helped individuals increase their self-esteem and make positive decisions for various problems in their lives (Okafor, Lucier-Greer & Mancini, 2016; Sa'ad, Yusooff, Nen, & Subhi, 2013; Schmitt Freire, Koller, Piason & Beatriz da Silva, 2005). It is also a therapy that focuses on the "here and now". This counseling method is known to help adolescents with feelings of insecurity, defensiveness, and can help improve relationships with parents, peers, teachers, and other professionals. This therapy can also help youth to make better choices, to think of their values, and to grow as individuals. A counselor's goal is to develop trust and rapport with clients leading them to discuss matters, produce change in their lives, and find solutions (Joseph & Murphy, 2013).

In order to find solutions, clients must focus on self-need (physically, safety, love, belonging, self-esteem, self-actualization). Also, clients must be aware of obstacles that get in the way of their achievements. By focusing on these areas, clients gain inner strength and courage for self-development. The true meaning of growth in person-centered therapy is to provide therapeutic relationships with clients that reflect congruence and unconditional positive regard, which is needed for the client to move forward. The counselor's approach is to demonstrate cooperation, provide a caring attitude, show acceptance and show empathy in a non-judgmental way, which increases communication, and helps a client experience positive growth (Joseph & Murphy, 2013).

Research has shown that the warm atmosphere of the therapist supports changes in a

client's behavior by increasing self-esteem and motivating the client to achieve personal goals (Joseph & Murphy, 2013; Okafor et al., 2016; Sa'ad et al., 2013; Schmitt Freire et al., 2005). In a group setting, individuals of different cultures can support each other, set goals, work to change and work on self-acceptance. It is known that as a result of this therapy that youth can become enthusiastic to grow when their social life is positive and welcoming (Joseph & Murphy, 2013; Okafor et al., 2016; Sa'ad et al., 2013; Schmitt Freire et al, 2005).

Person centered therapy has also been successful when applied to individuals, groups and in family therapy for youth who have difficulties with specific problems such as anxiety, substance abuse, depression, poverty, personality disorders and difficulties with grieving the loss of a family member or a close friend (Joseph & Murphy, 2013; Okafor et al; 2016; Sa'ad et al; 2013; Schmitt Freire et al; 2005). Youth are seen as having the capacity to make positive changes and find solutions to their challenges. It is by realizing their strengths that youth can grow and continue to achieve their highest potential.

Sa'ad and colleagues (2013) analyzed the achievements of the "person-centered therapy and Ad-Din cognitive psychology therapy related to self-concepts, depression and resiliency of pregnant teenagers" (p. 928). A total of 55 pregnant unmarried teenagers were chosen from three women shelters located in Malaysia. A total of two treatment groups and one control group were put in place to receive group counseling for one to two hours, once a week, for a total of seven weeks. Three questionnaires were given, multidimensional self-concept scale (SKKM), Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), and Adolescents Resiliency Attitude Scale (SDTR), prior to counseling and after completing the seven sessions of counseling. Results of the posttest after treatment with person-centered and a cognitive psychology group counseling showed a decrease in depression and an increase in self-concept and resiliency. After interventions were



implemented, pregnant teenagers felt accepted, understood, cared for, and understood that what they experienced personally and in their environment affects their self-concept, their lives, and the lives of others. In addition, a cognitive psychology counseling group can add a holistic approach (religion and spiritual healing source) to the person-centered therapy as a way to increase strengths and experience positive mental health (Sa'ad et al., 2013).

**Solution-Focused Therapy.** Solution-focused therapy is a brief strength-based approach that focuses on personal strengths in the present, applying them to build courage, motivation, and hope for a better future. The use of the solution-focused therapy encourages students to develop solutions instead of trying to solve problems. This therapy helps adolescents develop goals towards a preferred future, if adolescents want to change behaviors and are motivated to meet their goals (Trepper et al., 2013). Assessing and discussing resources with the youth, parent, professionals and community members is one way to begin. From this, further connection, support, and knowledge can lead youth to become positive, constructive and responsible individuals. The solution-focused therapist works with adolescents following an assumption that people are capable of finding solutions for their present problems by recognizing what works, and what they should continue doing. Several questions will be asked (using words they can understand), repeating what is being said in a positive way. Youth will be asked to imagine the future with no problems and what they would do differently compared to where they are now. The conversation can continue by utilizing every tool available to measure progress, establish changes and solutions for their future (Lutz et al., 2015).

Solution focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) is applied around the world, such as in the US for treating youth and adults as outpatients and in Europe for more serious patients (Trepper et al., 2013). SFBT has been successful for youth in schools because it can treat several behaviors, such

as academics problems and emotional disorders, and does not concentrate on past failing experiences and disabilities (Trepper et al., 2013). Reddy (2015), used SFBT for an individual with depression in India. A 19 year-old female was unsuccessful completing her Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) due to depression causing many disturbances and negative health problems (sad mood; decreased attention; loss of interest in studies, concentration, and memory; irritability; poor academics; guilt feelings; feeling of worthlessness; crying spells; decreased appetite; and lack of sleep) (Reddy, 2015). Her concern was the inability to recall what was presented in the classroom and what she has read, causing symptoms to develop, causing failure in everything that was important to her. In one year alone everything was out of control, including a demanding attitude from her mother to increase her academic performance. Things got so bad that she withdrew from her meditation and Indian dance classes, which were helping her before the occurrence of her symptoms. Antidepressant medication, for the most part, did not help her symptoms (Trepper et al., 2013).

The caseworker, who understood and had a caring attitude towards the client's problems, positively encouraged the client to share her goals for the future, and then the client believed she had a chance to recover from her symptoms. Techniques from the SFBT such as the miracle question and scaling were introduced. The caseworker continued asking how her challenges were taken care of in the past. The client explained participation in meditation, dancing, and going for a walk with her friends were the main coping measures (Trepper et al., 2013). She neglected to continue these activities because of the pressure from her mother to improve academics. After starting over using solution-focused therapy techniques, tremendous recovery occurred towards the client's depression. Solution-focused therapy is also known for its short-term sessions and more affordable therapy (Trepper et al., 2013).

## **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness therapy has been shown to have a positive effect on learning, emotional and social well-being, as well as mental and physical health (Davis, & Hayes, 2011; Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2013; Weare, 2012). It has evolved in the past ten years and is used in education, counseling, and in other professions. Mindfulness has been around for many years as a “Buddhist concept founded about 2,600 years ago”, but is recognized and accepted as part of psychotherapy today (Davis, & Hayes, 2012, p. 2). Mindfulness is a non-judgmental way of paying attention and being aware of thoughts, emotions and senses in the body that are experienced in the present (Davis & Hays, 2012). Mindfulness therapy is a method used to help people adapt to challenges in the environment and to find a personal balance to cope appropriately.

Researchers have discovered that mindfulness activities can change the brain activity of people in order for them to change their thinking and their way of feeling, resulting in a more positive approach to life (Davis, & Hayes, 2011; Davis, & Hayes, 2012; Keng et al., 2013; Weare, 2012). After several weeks of mindfulness practice, the cerebral cortex of the brain often becomes thicker, meaning that this part of the brain now has an increased ability to focus. An increase in the grey-matter of the hippocampus, resulting from mindfulness practice is responsible for remembering, learning and feeling empathy for others. Another part of the brain, the amygdala, shows a decrease on grey-matter, helping in reducing stress and anxiety (Davis, & Hayes, 2011; Davis, & Hayes, 2012; Keng et al., 2013; Weare, 2012).

According to Kazakevic (2016) and Weare (2012), mindfulness is known to have many benefits for students and teachers at school. It is a form of resilience that can improve emotional, physical and social well-being. Studies have shown that mindfulness can help youth to manage negative attitudes, improve self-assurance and sleeping patterns, resulting in feeling more

relaxed and in control, with a decrease in worries, and having better abilities to retain information and solve problems (Kazakevic, 2016; Weare, 2012). Research also shown that adolescents who are more aware and exhibit positive mental health perform better academically, in sports, in curricular activities and have better relationships with peers, teachers and other professionals. The concept of mindfulness is also valuable, safe, inexpensive, and students and staff enjoy the relaxed atmosphere. Mindfulness can be applied in every course at any chosen time. After implementing mindfulness, studies have shown that adolescents had control over their reactions, towards challenges that arise such as bullying, stress and anxiety (Kazakevic, 2016; Keng et al, 2013; Weare, 2012).

Several studies of mindfulness interventions were examined to determine their effects on mental health. Researchers determined that there are many benefits that can result from using or implementing mindfulness since it positively affects psychological health. It can be beneficial for everyone at any age as a way of understanding and controlling emotions, by preventing overreacting in stressful situations (Davis, & Hayes, 2011; Keng et al., 2013).

According to Kuyken and colleagues (2013), mental health can improve when mindfulness is incorporated into the curriculum and when interventions are applied in the classroom. In their study, a “mindfulness in school programme (MISP) was developed as a universal intervention for young people in secondary schools” (Kuyken et al., 2013, p. 126) between the ages of 12 to 16 years old (females and males). This mindfulness programme was implemented due to stress and struggles that youth were experiencing, such as low-grade depressive symptoms and their need for assistance every day. It was developed to comply with the curriculum, replacing religious studies or personal social and health education, and the programme was nine weeks long, delivered by educators in the schools (Kuyken et al., 2013).

The participating schools receiving MISP were compared with the control group, which taught their curriculum as usual. There were a total of 522 students who obtained consent for participating in the MISP interventions with trained teachers or who were part of the control groups; a total of 12 different high schools were involved in the study. The control groups were chosen by meeting certain conditions to match the MISP groups such as “fee-paying private schools versus public school and published school-level academic results” (Kuyken et al., 2013, p.128).

Results were gathered from the data at the start of the school year from a pre-assessment (age, gender, and ethnicity), from a post intervention assessment, and then an assessment after three months as a follow-up. The results indicated that the “acceptance and the efficacy” of the program showed positive outcomes (Kuyken et al., 2013, p. 128). Students who participated in questionnaires stated that they were experiencing less depressive symptoms after interventions and had less stress, and experienced an increase well-being at the three month follow-up (Kuyken et al., 2013, p. 128). This shows that mindfulness can have a positive effect on mental health.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2016) and the National Bullying Prevention Center (2016), there are many students who need support for being bullied since there are approximately 21% of students in the U.S who reported being bullied. Often stigma is causing them to be discriminated against due to rumors about their mental health. What people do not realize is that many of the bullies have a mental disorder of their own. In New Brunswick alone 1 in 2 adolescents are being bullied and this tendency is being seen more in girls than boys. In addition, 36% of youth have been victims once or twice in two months, while 20% have been both the victim and the bully (New Brunswick Health Council, 2016). The action

of bullying has been addressed as antisocial and oppositional behaviors, and causes both the victim and the bully to see a decrease in grades, experience mental health problems, experience an inability to solve problems, and to develop substance abuse disorders (New Brunswick Health Council, 2016).

In comparison, the National Center for Educational Statistics stated that in the United States, there are 1 in 3 students being bullying in school and 7 out of 10 students are in unstable emotional states because they have been victims of daily cyberbullying (National Education Association, 2015). What is most difficult to understand is that even though in the past five years there has been an increase in anti-bullying and bystander programs, there has been no significant positive change and professionals are running out of ideas to improve the situation (National Education Association, 2015). Some professionals have decided to adapt the practice of mindfulness in schools to prevent bullying which is being greatly appreciated by students and teachers because there is a decrease in conflicts and a better understanding of students' actions, which allows them to increase their skills, think more clearly and feel safe (National Education Association, 2015).

### **Mental Illness and Stigma**

What is stigma and how does it affect adolescent or adult mental health? Stigma is experienced in this population when someone causes disturbances among individuals with mental disorders (Sewilam et al., 2015; Young Minds, 2010). Often stigma causes embarrassment, low self-esteem, and affects an individual's ability to share the way he or she feels or acts toward others. Self-acceptance and responding to the challenges of mental illness, as well as communicating with others and making proper decisions become difficult (Anuradha et al., 2012; Sewilam et al., 2015; Young Minds, 2010). Stigma can develop at different times in

several ways, at different places and for many reasons.

Stigma related to mental illness is a major problem in schools (Young Minds, 2010). Adolescents are being labeled, humiliated, and discriminated against because they are looked at as being different from others based on assumptions and a lack of understanding (Sewilam et al., 2015; Young Minds, 2010). According to the Ministry of Education (2013), 14% of youth who have a mental disorder show signs of extreme anxiety and also have a disability. Often, youth do not obtain mental health services because they are afraid that people will judge and humiliate them (s, Wong, Cerully, Schultz, Eberhart, 2013; Parcesepe & Cabassa, 2013; Young Minds, 2010). In order to prevent this from happening, teachers can intervene by discussing mental health issues in class and encouraging youth to research the topic so they understand it. Professionals and organizations could also develop anti-stigma programs for the classroom and for parents as well as teachers, who can participate to support and discuss the effects that stigma has on youth who have mental disorders (Ministry of education, 2013).

### **Positive Mental Health**

What seems to be a key element to promote positive mental health is for youth to have stability in their lives, accept changes that are out of their control, and look forward to other positive things. Parents can provide an environment that has positive relationships within the family unit through unconditional love, warmth, encouragement, support, and advice (Mental Health, 2010).

It is important for a young person to have positive experiences living in a place without fear, where there are positive alternatives, such as participating in activities, laughing and making connections with family members, neighbors and the community. These factors can increase students' confidence and help them cope with the problems they experience every day

(Mental Health, 2010). When youth have positive mental health, they are able to confront challenges more easily and, therefore, be more resilient. Youth are also resilient when they are able to focus at school, believe they can make decisions, learn new skills, and adapt to change.

Nevertheless, research has shown that overall youth seem to have more challenges behaviorally and emotionally than in the past years, but this situation can be improved with internal and external protective factors. Overall, teenagers must have a trusting relationship with parents, peers, teachers, and someone in the community. Youth can thrive when they feel positive and have good social skills, hope for their future, and feel independent to solve problems using excellent communication skills (Anuradha et al., 2012).

### **Effective Interventions for Wellbeing and Resiliency**

When adolescents have built resiliency, they have the essential tool to use when problems and difficulties arise. They can use these tools (coping and resources) from their social connections and adapt by finding the strength to deal with emotions until a problem is resolved. In turn, this can further decrease the chance of mental illness or having behavior problems such as depression, anxiety, suicidal behavior, substance abuse and antisocial behavior (Cahill et al., 2014).

Adolescents who have abilities to cope and find assistance from their environment are more likely to have favorable outcomes academically and in their personal lives (Cahill et al., 2014). For example, in order to promote effective interventions for individuals to attain wellbeing and resiliency, social and emotional abilities must be a strong. There must also be a family experience with stability, providing close attachments and connections. In other words, positive parent-child bonding and communication, as well as family stability are approaches to well-being and they support resiliency. Community connections are also important in order to



create resources for learning, finding out about youth activities and developing personal relationships with peers and adults in the community (Cahill et al., 2014).

De Baca (2010) stated the reason why some youth succeed in school and others do not, even though they share comparable lifestyle and similar environmental difficulties, is due to a belief in oneself, feeling content, having ambition for setting goals, as well as associating with people and keeping stress under control. Furthermore, in order for youth to thrive at school they must learn resiliency skills and be willing to learn in a cooperative way (social emotional learning), take the information and rationalize it with personal strengths, and be able to reach out to others by making a connection. Youth must also have a productive learning environment. However, it often takes more to succeed in school when youth experience diverse challenges in their lives. According to Anuradha et al. (2012), youth mental health can be a struggle but can be improved by following the “Mental Wellbeing Model”.

Researchers determined that youth mental health can improve with physical activity, proper nutrition and managing stressors but it is not sufficient to make positive changes to survive the adolescent years. It is important not to forget values and beliefs as they assist in making healthy decisions. Anuradha and colleagues (2012) described the reasons why it is necessary to break the cycle of unhealthy wellbeing as soon as possible during adolescence, as learning then occurs more effectively and the change will then satisfy youth needs socially, emotionally, and academically. This in turn can prevent future risk such as self-harm and suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. To achieve long-term goals, youth need to increase health and meet education objectives throughout their high school years and fulfill their mental health needs in the future in order to prevent relationship difficulties, an unbalanced work history, and social rejections.

Research has shown that often the higher the level of resilience youth develop, the higher the grade point average will be when compared to peers who show limited resilience in school (De Baca, 2010). This indicates that youth with resiliency have a lower risk of failing and dropping out of school compared to youth who are not as resilient. However, when barriers are decreased and resiliency is adapted, youth academics improve. This is likely due to the support received from families and from professionals in the school who reinforce a higher level of expectation from youth and improve educator's knowledge of promoting resiliency in school. These interventions decrease youth "risk at home and in the community" (De Baca, 2010, p. 3).

### **Schools, Teacher, Parents and the Community Roles**

It is the responsibility of the schools to make sure the academic needs of adolescents are met so they can grow and succeed. Sometimes the influences at school are appropriate and at other times they might not support students due to circumstances beyond the school's control. The school may not have the flexibility, the finances, or the training for teachers on fostering resiliency. The school may have the capability and the training, but they might not apply the training to help adolescents to deal with their challenges or they may apply their resiliency training but resiliency is not achieved (Cahill et al., 2014). The most successful approach occurs when the school encourages well-being and incorporates resiliency in every class and every day and not just a couple weeks a year. This gives every adolescent the best chance to develop resiliency.

As mentioned previously, resiliency can be achieved when the environment of the adolescent is nurtured and when staff members, parent, and community members encourage youth and promote positive mental health. This positive gesture can be a financial asset to the school because when schools have powerful support from parents and the community, there is a

better chance to have additional support for financial situations in times of crises while still promoting resiliency (Cahill et al., 2014).

When schools want to promote resiliency, changes must occur in several areas such as the curriculum, school policies, and the environment, as well as the relationship with the community. Staff members must discuss how they feel about resiliency and using a strength-based approach, recognizing the strengths and challenges of their own youth, and how the staff members were affected when they knew someone cared to give them support, acknowledged that they mattered, and they realized they did not have to do it alone. This can lead to teamwork between youth, peers, parents, staff, and school administrators to promote participation of professionals in the community who are willing to help youth and their families with their need to succeed (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011). It is by working together that everyone learns from each other and together everyone develops strengths, capabilities, knowledge and opportunities. As Hillary Clinton mentioned in her 1996 book, “It takes a village to raise a child”.

The development of a curriculum must offer skills that teachers can teach in order for students to build resiliency. Teachers must build youth coping skills, problem solving, mindfulness, communication skills, positive mental health awareness, and stress management. Schools must put into practice and reinforce an anti-bullying policy, and have no tolerance for labeling and discrimination (Cahill et al., 2014). Protective factors need to be reinforced when things start to get out of control in the school system. With the help of a strength-based curriculum and the promotion of resiliency, youth can feel safe and take advantage of effective teaching practices in and out of school.

It is known that having resiliency can be an advantage for both students and teachers. Teachers and students can develop relationships and treat each other with respect. In turn,

students gain the skills to control their behavior and learn in a relaxed atmosphere by making a commitment to achieve tasks assigned to them in the classroom and at home. Researchers have determined that youth appreciate teachers who are fair, warm, and supportive, and who can manage a classroom. From this aspect some teachers have become important role models and even mentors to youth when a bond developed, making youth feel that they belong (Cahill et al., 2014).

As for parents, they want to protect their children from any risk and develop a bond between them that is warm, helpful, and experienced without judgment. Parents' involvement in an adolescent's interests helps the adolescent develop self-esteem, trust, confidence and independence, showing the adolescent they are important and that someone cares (Smith Harvey, 2013). Other important factors for parents to implement include encouraging youth to be positive and to be themselves, to have high expectations and boundaries, to be responsible for their actions in order to feel safe and to obey the rules so that trust between parents and youth is not broken. Youth must know that parents will be there for them for support no matter what happens (unconditional love). It is also an advantage when youth can see their parents support them and listen to their ideas, because youth also have the need to be praised for their achievements. They also want to be able to communicate their thoughts and feelings, to be shown that they are understood, and that they are forgiven for their mistakes. Research has revealed that these values and ways of connecting with parents can also help young people develop close relationships with peers, professionals at school and people in the community (Alberta Mentoring Partnership, 2013; Cahill et al., 2014; Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario, 2016; Mental Health, 2010; Smith Harvey, 2013).

Schools can provide an exceptional opportunity for all students in need to thrive and

receive the help they deserve by participating in a “school-based mentoring program” (Alberta Mentoring Partnership, 2013). The in-school-based mentoring program can occur for an extended period of time and focus on positive relationship and lowering risks. The program can partner with other schools in the district, and other organizations such as the “big brother and big sister” organization where volunteers are chosen by the “mentoring organization” (Alberta Mentoring Partnership, 2013, p.9). The volunteers commit to see students individually, one hour a week for the school year. Professionals from the schools can develop referrals for students in need, which can give them an advantage to succeed.

The community can play a big role to connect with youth. Research concluded that youth and professionals do not form relationships by just changing the curriculum but by having positive contact with people around them (students, teachers, administration, parents, and volunteers) and gaining opportunities for students to be active and get involved in groups, peer helping, cooperative learning, cross-age mentoring and community services (Alberta Mentoring Partnership, 2013; Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario, 2016; Resilience Initiative, 2010). Community services can be helpful for youth when there is collaboration with community partners and helpful professional staff working to expand their skills and encourage families to get involved in their children’s lives so they can grow and become responsible individuals (Alberta Mentoring Partnership, 2013; Cahill et al., 2014).

### **Application**

There are several studies that have determined the need for applying a curriculum that promotes resiliency into the school system in order for adolescents to learn how to deal with conflict and develop coping measures. The curriculum that is part of this project will be provided for school counselors to help high school teachers overcome difficult situations that affect

student's behaviors, emotional feelings from negative experiences, interpersonal problems, and family difficulties. Incorporating this curriculum can assist teachers with delivering information needed to help students make proper choices, have a voice and experience consistency in their lives so they have a chance to look at the future in a positive way

The curriculum that will be incorporated in the school district of New Brunswick will contain eight lesson plans that can be applied in a regular classroom. Students at risk need the assistance of these lesson plans, and every student in the classroom can benefit. Youth who have the capabilities can reinforce the strengths of students who need assistance.

There are several techniques in this curriculum, such as the person-centered, solution-focused and mindfulness therapies, that have shown positive results. Positive thinking can occur with the help of person-centered therapy. It has been known to help youth accept themselves, to find the triggers of negative thinking and learn to accomplish tasks. Therefore youth can increase awareness on how to reshape their thinking and adapt to changes by utilizing motivation and personal strengths to cope, and learn to develop a positive attitude, with the help of positive reinforcement from people in their environment. Mancini (2016) recommended person-centered therapy and coping strategies for various cultures, such as military families, who often have adjustment issues which can cause stress. These issues can be helped when "physical, emotional, cognitive and social changes" and stressors are acknowledged, analyzed and supported in a way to meet students' needs (Okafor et al., 2016, p. 133). To further assist youth with their difficulties, it is essential to put in practice the use of positive techniques such as coping skills, self-talk and relaxation, as well as choosing extracurricular activities and resources that can be incorporated into the lesson plans. Researchers have determined that extracurricular activities have been successful but there are exceptions to every implementation because some

activities may not work for everyone (Peck, Roeser, Zarrett, & Eccles, 2008).

According to Davidson (2014), using solution-focused therapy is another way for youth to learn to adapt to challenges and recognize the strength-based concept needed for positive development. It is important to discover the meaning of the “acronym STRENGTH” and utilize this solution-focused therapy as a tool to develop lessons, find solutions for difficulties and determine if the lessons will help youth achieve their goals (S is for solutions-focus, T is for trajectory review, R is for resources development, E is for exceptions analysis, N is for noticing positives, G is for goal setting, T is for tenacity review and H is for human-capacity development) (Davidson, 2014). Research has shown that solution-focused therapy can help adolescents with mild to moderate depression by decreasing their negative attitude and motivating them to make changes concerning their emotional feelings. Furthermore, it is a tremendous concern when mental health problems such as depression escalate and lead to self-harm and suicide. This knowledge shows the need to educate youth using a plan that includes parents, professionals and the community concerning self-harm and how it can be prevented. These dilemmas can occur because of negative interactions with peers, the negative relationships with parents, environmental barriers at school, as well as social economic barriers that are out of youth control. This shows the need for support from family and community mentors, coaches and professionals who can help youth build strengths and resiliency.

Mindfulness is another technique that can be used in the classroom and is incorporated in the lesson plans to help youth adapt to negative situations and manage emotions and behaviors through relaxation and concentration (Ken, Smoski, & Robins, 2013). This therapy can help youth to focused, stay on task, and understand how to cope with the challenges of stigma, discrimination, bullying, and anxiety. Research has determined that this practice has helped

youth solve problems in a more responsible way. Concentration seems to improve and youth are capable of behaving and thinking appropriately, eliminating self-harm and suicidal thoughts (Davis & Hayes, 2012).

There are several ways that youth can learn from these lessons plans through the use of sensory learning. Youth can use their visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic senses in the classroom. Some youth learn best when practicing and analyzing issues individually and some youth learn best when brainstorming in groups of two to four students and sharing their information with the class. A philosopher named Ignacio Estrada stated, “If a child is not learning in the way you teach, change your teaching strategy and teach the child in the way he learns!” (Wolpert-Gawron, 2008). Another important theory that is being applied to help youth to cope is the implementation of mindfulness.

Stigma and discrimination has been a major problem causing fear and insecure feeling in the school system. Additional difficulties that can arise is when bullying destroys youth self-confidence, communication, and coping skills. Most importantly, not to forget economic issues such as poverty that can affect youth proper nutrition, leading youth to have eating disorders and low self-esteem, all of which can lead to depression. These are all barriers to be aware as adolescents, parents and professional in order to find solutions to overcome these challenges, and for learning to potentially occur in the classroom, at home and in the community.

The lessons in this curriculum contain educational objectives, goals, materials, procedures and resources to guide professionals. Youth welfare can be discovered and will be assisted when lesson plans are implemented and are used to overcome barriers, leading students to demonstrate a positive attitude and experience a positive self-image. Some youth have to live in uncontrollable environments, making it challenging to manage and prevent mental health



problems. To have a resilient mind for better mental health takes a lot of determination, confidence, and coping skills to adapt to changes and stimulate an inner strength to find ways to get through the hard times, learn to think positively, and enjoy life.

In the first lesson, students will start with an icebreaker and a discussion about resiliency. In lesson two, students will assess their level of thinking to acknowledge if they are positive or negative thinkers and what triggers them to be negative thinkers. In lesson three, students will learn the meaning of stigma, how to deal with stigma and how to adapt to the negative attitudes that causes stereotype and discrimination. In lesson four, bullying will be defined and students will learn how bullying affects self-esteem and what interventions can be put in place to prevent and respond to bullying. In lesson five youth will learn ways to control emotions in challenging situations such as substance abuse, eating disorders, and poverty. In lesson six, students will learn the meaning of mindfulness and how this therapy can help overcome challenges. In lesson seven, students will identify how to manage stressors and how to prevent depression, self-harm and suicide. In lesson eight, students will learn how to develop good relationship with peers, parents and professionals.

### **Conclusion**

Promoting resiliency and supporting positive mental health in adolescence is not an easy task to accomplish at school, at home, or in their environment. This project was developed to assist high school professionals by providing a curriculum that can help professionals understand adolescent needs and help adolescents grow as individuals and achieve success. The need to develop resiliency and reach positive mental health is a challenge when youth do not have the skills or resources to accomplish these goals. This is why strength-based approaches and the use of the person-centered model was suggested, to promote resiliency and develop positive mental

health in a high school setting for adolescents who have difficulties connecting with people, coping with challenges and finding solutions.

From personal observations and data collected from researchers, it has become clear that youth show positive results when resiliency is achieved. There has been marked success using the application created for this project in a high school classroom and in a student wellness group. To build on this experience, a decision was made to continue further using additional strength-based approaches. Several lesson plans were developed to motivate youth and give them the courage to deal with the challenges. In order to have resiliency and reach positive mental health, the involvement of parents, peers, teachers and professionals in the community is needed because they can be excellent resources. Information gathered from the literature shows additional need for support, consistency, empowerment, and the hope of learning in a safe and collaborative environment.

The success of students with behavior problems, mental health disorders, those living in poverty or those who have experienced trauma may be open to change when students' resiliency needs are met and they are able to respond to their environment. One of many important pieces of information to remember is what Albert Einstein expressed in his writing: "If schools are able to teach young people to have a critical mind and a socially oriented attitude, they will have done all that is necessary. Students will then become equipped with those qualities which are prerequisite for citizens living in a healthy democratic society" (Alberta Mentoring Partnership, 2013; Resiliency Initiatives, 2011).

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## Appendix A: Lesson Plans

# Resilient Minds for Better Mental Health With A Strength-Based High School Curriculum



Google image

By Anne Madore

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### **Developing a Positive Mental Health Curriculum**

A comprehensive mental health curriculum was developed to improve resiliency in high school students with the help of strength-based lesson plans. These lessons will improve coping skills by helping youth manage stress and increase motivation. It will enhance a sense of belonging, competence, empowerment, usefulness and feeling protected from harm internally and environmentally. This in turn will promote a nurturing culture in schools and better relationships with parents, teachers and other professionals in the community. The curriculum contains 8 lessons that will help to meet the needs of students academically, psychologically, and socially. Subsequently, this curriculum can lead youth to new opportunities, growth and satisfaction, in order to meet their future goals.



## **Lesson Plans**

### **Lesson 1: Promoting Resiliency and Identifying Strengths**

**Grade Level(s): 9-12<sup>th</sup> Grade**

**Description of the Lesson:**

In this lesson students will learn the importance of identifying their strengths and learn how to use those strengths to adapt to challenges in the environment. It is by facing their fears and conflicts that resiliency will develop.

**Goals:**

- Recognize that becoming a resilient person can help in dealing with every struggles that are encountered daily.
- Acquire knowledge and support from people the youth encounters, through observation and practice when at school, home and in the community.
- Learn how to recover quickly from challenges by recognizing personal skills in order to deal with adversity.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Identify how to cope with personal challenges.
- Learn tools and techniques to help build resiliency.
- Identify how to adapt to changes and develop a plan to meet academic goals.

**Materials:**

- Pens
- Post-it
- Picture from a Magazine or the Internet
- White Board

- Information on Resiliency

**Procedures:**

- **Ice Breaker:** Pictures will be spread on a table and then students will be asked to come forward and choose a picture that reminds them of the word *resiliency*. Then, students will share individually with the class why they think their picture reminds them of resiliency.
- The subject of resiliency will be discussed with the class by putting keywords on the board.
- On a post-it students will be asked to write their own definition and an example of when they were resilient, or someone that has shown resiliency in the classroom or at home. Students will then share with the class.
- The teacher will draw a circle on the board and divide it in three pieces, writing how resiliency is seen, touched, and heard. Individual responses will be shared with the class.
- On a piece of paper students will identify what they have learned from the lesson.
- Students will write one scenario about a positive event and what they learned from it. Using another scenario, students will write about a negative event and what actions would be done differently now that they have learned about resiliency, if this event happened again.
- Information will be sent home to let parents know what was discussed in class today. This is a way to help youth and their parents understand resiliency and to further help youth develop skills to deal with challenges.

**Closure:** After discussing and sharing information about resiliency, let the students know that we all have different struggles in our lives, and they are not easy to accept at times. This is why



students are being taught about resiliency: so they can identify their strengths, learn to use those strengths, put them into practice, and become resilient persons. Information will be sent home to parents to encourage parent-child communication and begin conversations about what teenagers have to deal with. Hopefully students will learn that parents, teachers and other people are there to help them with resiliency. An activity on resiliency will be going home with students so that the teacher can evaluate if this lesson was productive and students are able to change their attitudes to become resilient persons.

**This lesson was created based on the following resources:**

Australian Professionals (2013). Building resiliency in young people. Reach Out Teachers

Network, 1-40. Retrieved from <http://au.professionals.reachout.com/austalian-curriculum>

Barclays Life Skills (2015). People skills: Building confidence and resilience volunteer-led

lessons. *The National Autistic Society*, 10-14. Retrieved from

<http://www.barclayslifeskills.com/teachers/lessons/building-confidence-and-resilience/>

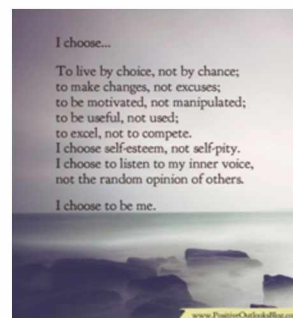
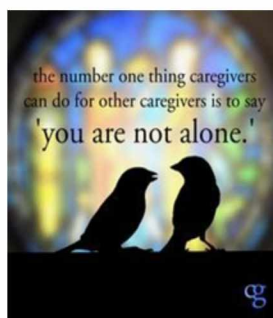
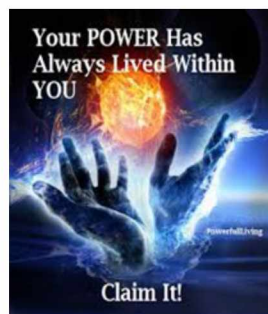
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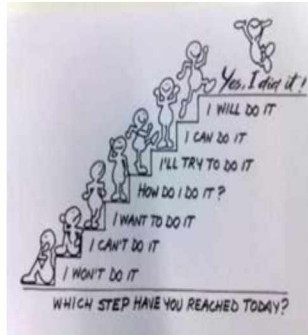
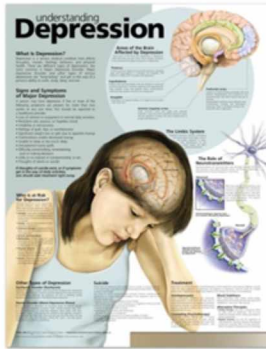
ed, 1-60. Retrieved from

[www.mentalhealth4kids.ca/healthylibrary\\_docs/BounceBackBooklet2014.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth4kids.ca/healthylibrary_docs/BounceBackBooklet2014.pdf)

Choose a picture with information or without information that reminds you of the word  
resiliency and share your choice with the class.







Develop key words that describe resiliency and write them on the board. Examples:

Stress

Satisfying

Cope

Productive

Healthy

Strength

Empowered

Improve

confidence

Hope

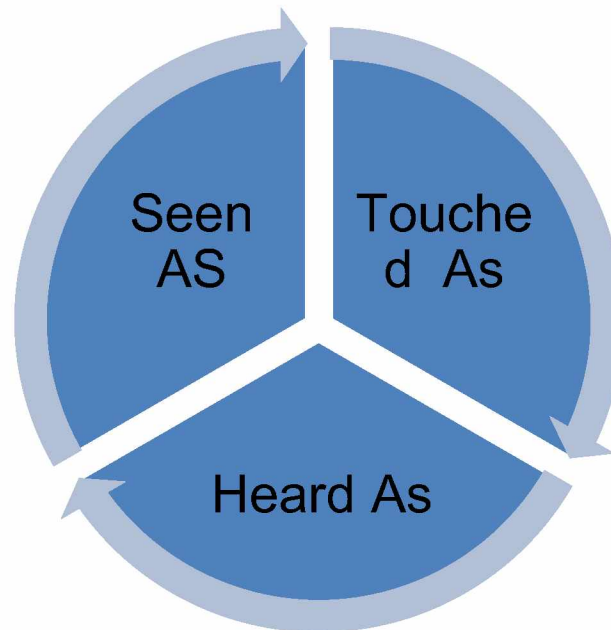
Skills

self-esteem



Exercise	Nurture	Opportunities
Control	Life Style	Accomplish
Nutrition	Changes	Goals
Sleep	Realistic	Solutions



**Resiliency is seen, touched, and heard as what?****Reinforcing our Strengths****Controlling Emotions****Finding Solutions and New Opportunities**

- 1- Write a scenario about a positive event and what was learned from it.
- 2- Write a scenario about a negative event and what action could be done differently if it were to occur again.
- 3- Write down on a piece of paper what was learned from the resiliency lesson and turn the assignment sheet at the end of class. If it is not completed in class it should be finished for homework and turned in by the next class.

<http://www.barclayslifeskills.com/teachers/lessons/building-confidence-and-resilience/>

### **Parents /Guardians**

Parents are encouraged to read information that is sent home concerning resiliency and apply the information in order to help youth communicate their feelings, encourage interactions and help them to seek support when needed.

### **Facts About Adolescence and Being Resilient**

This fact sheet is distributed to students and their parents-guardian to inform them about what is being taught at school at this time and how adults can help adolescents to become resilient and develop positive mental health. What this means is for adolescents to cope with challenges by using their strengths, they must adjust by developing a positive attitude and look forward to new opportunities. In order to learn more about resiliency, here are some suggestions and ways that adolescents can become resilient.

#### **Support and Motivate Youth to Think Positively**

- Consider that there are people in a worse situation than you are in.
- Have a good sense of humor even when problems arise.
- Do not overestimate challenges because there are solutions to everything.

#### **Develop Goals and be Organize to meet those Goals**

- Support youth to refrain from exaggerating and learn to calm down.
- Teach youth to reflect before they decide to pursue an action.
- Complement youth when they do not give up when things are difficult.
- Tell youth how proud you are of them for finding solutions to their problems and show them resources that will help them to accomplish a task.
- Help youth to expect difficult times ahead and plan to deal with them by organizing enjoyable activities.



**Be Aware of Negative Emotions**

- Express and share feelings with youth so they can also learn to communicate with you.
- Help youth to recognize conditions that trigger them and causes them to get nervous, fearful, irritated, and anxious.
- Discuss strategies for controlling intense emotions.
- Teach youth about having empathy for others.

**Pursuing Assistance**

- Encourage youth to discuss matters that are troubling them and ways to overcome these matters.
- Teach youth that having negative emotions are often normal responses.
- Acknowledge that youth must find ways to calm down when stress takes over before dealing with challenges.

**Confidence**

- Complement youth when they find a solution to a challenge that was giving them difficulty.
- Reassure youth that they cannot always succeed but that it is trying to do your best that matters.
- Support youth by informing them that they need to have a voice and be heard when challenging situations occur in their lives.
- Give youth confidence to participate in a variety of activities that are out of their comfort zone.

## **Lesson 2: Positive Thinking and Well-Being**

**Grade Level(s): 9-12th Grade**

### **Description of the Lesson:**

In this lesson, the counselor will introduce and discuss positive thinking and negative thinking and compare the differences. It will also be important to determine awareness and identification of the triggers for negative thinking. After recognizing the triggers, students will learn how to re-shape their thinking to continue thinking positively. Students will begin to realize that having positive reinforcement will help them to be more positive and to be happier individuals. The more you are aware of your thoughts, the better you'll be able to change them to positive outcomes, such as attracting positive people. Therefore, if you want to create an environment where there is success, you will need the power of positive thinking on your side.

**Goals:** Students will be able to recognize what triggers negative thinking and the ways to make changes in order to be a more positive person in the future.

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Understand the definition of positive thinking and negative thinking.
- Identify triggers that will cause negative thinking and what it does to your brain.
- Identify what can lead a person to become a positive thinker and what it does to their brain.
- Discuss how a person can re-shape their thinking to continue thinking positively.
- Increase awareness on how to overcome challenges and become positive individuals.
- Recognize when a friend may be experiencing negative thoughts.
- Learn when and where to utilize survival skills.

**Materials:**

- Pen
- Paper
- Motivational Stickers
- Visual Aids on Positive Thinking
- White board or flip chart paper (and markers)
- Assessment Activity (Are you a Positive or Negative Thinker?)
- Student Handout “Surround Yourself with Positive People.”
- Positive Quotes “Let Your Positive Shine.”

**YouTube Video:**

The Secret of Becoming Mentally Strong (15:01) URL: [https:// www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFbv757kup4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFbv757kup4)

Are you a positive thinker or a negative thinker (5:10) URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVkM-mBJMDY>

**Procedures:**

- 1- **Icebreakers:** The M&M game involves using candy of 6 different colors (red, blue, green, yellow, orange, and brown), put in a plastic bag and eating them after answering questions. There are 6 questions to answer, where everyone will take turn to share their thoughts and learn from each other. The 6 questions to answer are as follow:

**Red-** What hobby do you have or like to do?

**Blue-** Best memories you can think of in your life?

**Green-** What can't you live without?

**Yellow-** What is your dream job?

**Orange-** Something that is stressing you at this time?

**Brown-** Something good that has happened this week?

- 2- Ask students to describe positive and negative thinking? How can we recognize the triggers of negative thinking and how can we change thoughts to be positive. The answer is then written on a flip chart paper.
- 3- What is positive reinforcement and how can it help to improve youth thinking.
- 4- Discuss what can lead a person to be a positive thinker and what it does to your brain.
- 5- Discuss what can lead a person to become a negative thinker and what it does to your brain.
- 6- Discuss how to increase positive thinking in your life and get rid of negative thinking.
- 7- A video on YouTube will be shown, addressing how to utilize your strength to cope effectively and becoming mentally strong. After seeing the video students will share their opinions about what they have learned and what part of the video was most important to them.

### **Closure:**

After discussing and sharing factors associated with positive and negative thinking, let the students know that people can change their ways of thinking and acting and learn from their mistakes. However, students need to remember what triggers them to develop negative thinking and that it takes a lot of work to overcome it, such as positive reinforcement from everyone they encounter but especially the people they love. It is true that living in an environment where there are positive people, can lead others to have positive attitudes.

**This lesson was created based on the following resources:**

<http://www.the-benefits-of-positive-thinking.com/negative-thinking-versus-positive-thinkin...>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/prime-your-gray-cells/201108/happy-brain-happy-1...>

<http://jamesclear.com/positive-thinking>

## **Handout**

Read to youth and discuss how they feel about what is being said in the hand out and quotes.

### **Surround Yourself with Positive People**

When someone cares

- it's easier to speak
- it's easier to listen
- it's easier to play
- it's easier to work

When someone cares it's easier to laugh

**-Susan Polis Shutz-**

## **Positive Quotes**

### **Let Your Positive Shine**

- Always believe in yourself. Your happiness depends on no one else but you. If there is something that you are unhappy about, you can change it.
- Find moments to connect with other individuals who are full of smiles and hugs to give away and stories and laughter to share.

**-Barbara Cage-**

### **Lesson 3: Mental Health and Stigma**

#### **Grade Level(s): 9-12th Grade**

**Description of the Lesson:** In this lesson, individuals will discuss and learn about mental health and compare positive and negative mental health. They will also learn about stigma that is associated with mental illness, and how we can reduce the negative attitudes that can lead to stereotyping and discrimination.

**Goals:** Teach youth, parents and professionals about mental health and stigma in order to help change their attitudes towards stereotyping and discriminating against individuals.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

- Describe what mental health.
- Identify positive and negative mental health.
- Understand the stigma surrounding mental health problems.
- Learn how to overcome stigma and discrimination and understand the realistic facts of mental illness.

#### **Materials:**

- Pen
- Handouts
- Worksheets
- Questionnaires / Quiz
- Flip Chart
- Journal Assignment

#### **Procedures:**

- 1- First, ask students what mental health means and if they can differentiate the difference

between negative and positive mental health. The answer will then be written on a flip chart paper and will be discussed.

- 2- Identify if students know what “stigma” means in the context of mental health, and if they understand how stigma can affect people with mental health conditions. The response will be discussed in groups of 4 and put on paper with words or drawings. After this activity, every group will share their feelings with the class.
- 3- A handout will be distributed and discussed with students about statistics, facts, and myths about mental illness.
- 4- Students can follow the discussion by filling out the blanks from the worksheets.
- 5- After students have completed their worksheet they can answer quiz questions by choosing true or false.
- 6- For homework, students will write in their journals what they have learned from this class and how stigma can be reduced.

**Closure:** After discussing and sharing information with students about mental health and stigma, students must learn that many people won’t get the help they need due to the fear of being labelled by people in their environment and sometimes the labeling can be worse than the disease itself. This is why stigma needs to end in order to prevent people from being judged and discriminated against.

**This lesson was created based on the following resources:**

Alberta Teachers Association (2016). Can we talk? Mental health lesson plans. *Canadian Mental Health Association*. Retrieved from [canwetalk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/.../COOR-791-2016-03-CWT-lesson-plans.pdf](http://canwetalk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/.../COOR-791-2016-03-CWT-lesson-plans.pdf)

[www.mentalhealth4kids.ca/healthlibrary\\_docs/BounceBackBooklet2014.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth4kids.ca/healthlibrary_docs/BounceBackBooklet2014.pdf)



### **Handout**

Stigma and mental illness will be introduced and shared with youth concerning the effect, facts, and myths about mental illness.

- Statistics on mental illness
- What is stigma?
- Stigma affecting people with mental illness
- Myths and Facts about mental illness

### **Worksheet**

Youth will fill out the blanks concerning the issue of stigma.

### **Questionnaire / Quiz**

Youth will answer true or false.

### **Homework /Journal**

Youth will write in their journal what they learn about stigma and mental illness and what can be done to decrease stigma that is experienced every day.

### **Lesson 4: Facing Bullying and Promoting Self-Respect**

**Grade Level(s): 9-12th Grade**

**Description of the Lesson:**

In this lesson student will learn about bullying and how to prevent it or put an end to it, by recognizing what is causing it and how to gain self-respect. They will understand the effects of bullying and when to speak up or have a team approach to report the action.

**Goals:**

- Teach about bullying and the scars it may leave on the victims while listening and seeing this act of violence.
- Learn how to prevent or stop the bullying by facing the perpetrators and taking the initiative by letting someone know in order to gain self-respect.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Learn about bullying and the facts about bullying; as well as short-term and long-term effects.
- Discuss how to prevent bullying and to end it with the help of a team approach.
- Explain how to report the incidence of bullying to appropriate people and gain self-respect by letting the perpetrators know they crossed the boundaries.
- Review school policies regarding bullying and the procedure to follow that pertain to the State or Province youth are living in.

**Materials:**

- Pens
- Markers
- White Board or Flip Chart

- Facts Sheets
- Questions and answer worksheet (The Truth about Bullying)
- Activity Sheets (A plan to help prevent bullying).
- Survey about cyberbullying

**You Tube Video:**

How To Set Healthy Boundaries in a Relationship (2:51) url:<https://youtu.be/w0kpPddWqjM>

and Personal Boundaries: 5 ways to teach people how to treat us properly! (6:49) URL:

<https://youtu.be/KhW4g9urdXQ>

**Procedures:**

- 1- First ask students what bullying means and if they can describe cyberbullying. The answers will be put on a piece of paper on the wall. There will be 4 pieces of paper on the wall around the class and 4 groups of students will choose a piece of paper to write their answers.
- 2- Identify the effects of bullying and if some students has ever bullied or been bullied and discuss in groups how it made them feel, then share it with class. Students can then watch the video on how to set healthy boundaries in a relationship.
- 3- Determine what ways students can respect themselves and others and earn self-respect from others. This can be supported by doing acts of kindness with each other and then with one specific person in their high school.
- 4- Discuss and identify a bystander in the school that might be available when someone is being bullied.
- 5- Research additional information on the computer concerning statistics on bullying and the laws on bullying and cyberbullying and when to report it. Students will then develop a report as an assignment that is due in one week from the day of this session.

**Closure:**

After discussing and sharing the definition and facts on bullying, students will understand the effects of bullying and how so many people can be available to provide help to students. Other factors to consider: it is ok to be nice to people by performing acts of kindness to peers and professionals in their environment.

**This lesson was created based on the following resources:**

How To Set Healthy Boundaries in a Relationship (2:51) url:<https://youtu.be/w0kpPddWqjM>  
and Personal Boundaries: 5 ways to teach people how to treat us properly! (6:49) URL:  
<https://youtu.be/KhW4g9urdXQ>

## **Lesson 5: Handling Challenges with Emotional Awareness**

**Grade Level(s): 9-12th Grade**

### **Description of the Lesson:**

In this lesson students will determine ways to confront personal barriers and control emotional responses when facing personal dilemmas.

### **Goals:**

- Learn how to recognize and understand one's own emotions and how to control them in challenging situations.
- Develop a personal habit of writing feelings in personal journal every day and sharing individual thoughts in order to feel better about oneself.

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Demonstrate awareness of one's own feelings and find ways to overcome challenges.
- Recognize ways to build confidence and finding solutions.

### **Materials:**

- Pens
- Paper (writing scenario)
- List of emotions
- Recording Journal

### **Procedures:**

- 1- Everyone in the classroom will brainstorm in groups of four, challenges that someone they knew experienced in the past and the difficulties they had to overcome. Then the group will share the results with the class.
- 2- Students will take a piece of paper and define what are challenges and emotions. Then

they must write three scenarios based on their personal experiences they have faced in the past or at the present time that were challenging and emotional for them.

- 3- Students will express their emotions and challenges they have to deal with every day at school, home and in the community in their journals. Students are to specifically write about what emotions they experienced (positive or negative), what the challenges were and how they handled the situations.

**Closure:** After discussing and sharing information about challenges and emotions with the class, students should be encouraged to continue sharing their emotions with others at school, home and with individuals in the community, so they can become resilient to challenges when they occur.

**This lesson was created based on the following resources:**

<http://au.professionals.reachout.com/australian-curriculum>

### **My Abilities and Competence**

**Personal approaches I am strong in:**

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

**What I admire about myself:**

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Praise received from others:**

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Difficulties I have defeated:**

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

## **Lesson 6: Adapting Coping Skills and Mindfulness**

**Grade Level(s): 9-12th Grade**

### **Description of the Lesson:**

In this lesson students will learn ways to control emotions in challenging situations. It is important to find alternative ways of dealing with difficulties. When learning how to cope, students will learn how to focus in order to achieve their goals.

### **Goals:**

- Improve focus, concentration, reduce stress, becoming self-aware of personal emotions and activities, and how to control them in the present time.
- Reflect on different ways students can cope and learn every day (through sensory learning).

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Students will learn how to handle frustration by understanding how to manage emotions in the present moment non-judgmentally.
- Students will develop skills for social emotional learning by learning what influences their thinking, feelings and behaviors (self-awareness).
- Students will develop ways of paying attention and develop a sense of purpose that can help them focus on things that are important to them and are able to achieve (breathing exercise in the classroom).

### **Materials:**

- Pen
- Paper
- Sheet (ideas on mindfulness)



- Cards on Impulse Control & Strategy
- Scenarios on impulses
- Journal

**Procedures:**

- **Ice Breaker-** The class will start with a five minute of mindfulness with a breathing exercise to help students to be aware of their thoughts and learn how to control them.
- Students will discuss with the class how this exercise made them feel and if it was a good skill to utilize in order to help them cope.
- Student will then be asked to discuss in groups of four if they know of other ways to cope with challenges and write their response on a piece of paper. After this exercise, their information will be discussed with the class.
- Student will then be taught other ways to cope with positive strategy cards (stop & think, breathe and think of three responses).
- Students will then develop a scenario, concerning ways to control behaviors. They will write about any problems they may have with someone and what will they do to cope with the situation.
- Students will end the lesson by writing in their journals what they have learned from this lesson and how this will help them to cope with further situations in the future.

**Closure:**

The reasoning behind this lesson is to teach students ways to cope appropriately and manage their emotions. This can potentially be accomplished through strategies that can utilize all of

their senses and apply them to overcome their negative experiences (thinking, feelings, behaving, practice).

**This lesson was created based on the following resources:**

<http://au.professionals.reachout.com/australian-curriculum>

[www.mentalhealth4kids.ca/healthlibrary\\_BounceBackBooklet2014.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth4kids.ca/healthlibrary_BounceBackBooklet2014.pdf)

## **Lesson 7: Managing Stress and Preventing Self-Harm**

**Grade Level(s): 9-12th Grade**

### **Description of the Lesson:**

In this lesson student will learn what stress is and why it develops. They will also learn how stress can affect them, what medical problems can develop and in what ways stress can be managed to prevent self-harm or other medical conditions.

### **Goals:**

- Identify the negative ways that high level of stress can effects students' lives.
- Learn healthy ways to cope and manage stress in order to prevent further complications.

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Students will recognize bad and good stress and how to control it.
- Acknowledge that a minimum amount of stress is necessary. however it must be handled properly so it doesn't develop serious problems emotionally, physically and socially.
- Students will learn how to increase emotional balance by practicing strategies every time stress gets out of control.

### **Materials:**

- Pens
- Paper
- Discussion Sheet (Effects of stress and coping with stress)
- Worksheets (Bounce Back Curriculum)
- Sheet (Letting go of Worries)
- Online Activity (research coping mechanism and stress management techniques)
- Work sheet on self-talk (building resiliency curriculum)

**Procedures:**

- Students will go online and search for coping mechanisms for dealing with stress and write down if they have used these methods before. They will write them down and then share them in class.
- Students will also search stress management techniques and determine which method they believe would be best for them and why.
- Students will discuss ways students cope with stress and determine if it is positive or negative.

**Closure:** After researching information online, discussing and writing about ways to manage stress, students will be encouraged to put in practice what they have learned with peers, teachers and parents so they can find emotional balance.

**This lesson was created based on the following resources:**

Australian Professionals (2013). Building resiliency in young people. Reach Out Teachers Network, 1-40. Retrieved from <http://au.professionals.reachout.com/austalian-curriculum>

Student Support Leadership Initiative (2014). Bounce back...Again. Mental Health for Kids, (2) ed, 1-60. Retrieved from [www.mentalhealth4kids.ca/healthylibrary\\_docs/BounceBackBooklet2014.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth4kids.ca/healthylibrary_docs/BounceBackBooklet2014.pdf)

## **Lesson 8: Connections with Peers, Parents and Professionals**

### **Grade Level(s): 9-12th Grade**

#### **Description of the Lesson:**

In this lesson, students will acknowledge their strengths and develop a positive relationship with people in their environment, which can help them engage in academics and in social interactions. People in their environment can be peers, parent, teachers, professional and other important people such as volunteers, coaches and mentors.

#### **Goals:**

- Identify personal strengths that can be used and worked on for developing additional strengths to succeed.
- Learn to develop trust and work collaboratively with others in a team approach.
- Identify additional resources available that may guide the team to find strategies that overcome challenges in student's lives and have a positive mental health.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

- Students will work closely with teachers at school to promote a trusting relationship with students to increase their strengths and motivate them to engage in the classroom and to accomplish goals.
- At home parents will continue communicating with their children on all subjects of interest and what challenges them in their daily lives. They will also help in their future plans by sharing knowledge and their life experiences needed to make appropriate decisions and lead them to success.
- Volunteers or mentors will work in a trusting relationship, providing advocacy, guidance and enhance their creativity by finding new opportunities.

- Professional in the community will be approached for implementing a program that would accommodate student's emotional well-being so they can continue to believe in themselves and apply their knowledge.

**Materials:**

- Pen
- Paper
- Facts Sheet on character strengths
- Work sheet on character strengths
- Template for tracking character strengths
- Contract to work together to accomplish goals.

**Procedures:**

- Students will be monitored closely towards accomplishing goals and objectives of each lesson in the curriculum.
- The team of individuals will work with all students to help them engage in the classroom and have a trusting relationship with one another.
- The team will work collaboratively together once a week to identify what works best for the students while using their learned skills.
- At the end of eight weeks the team will make a decision if additional lessons are needed to make sure students have developed coping measures, have adapted to their environment and the classes were successful to build resiliency.

**Closure:**

Every day student will be assessed to identify if they are using their strengths to learn and accomplish tasks. In addition strategies from the team will be discussed once a week in meetings

to acknowledge students strengths, growth and successes.

**This lesson was created based on the following resources**

<http://au.professionals.reachout.com/-/.../mywellbeingmyclassroomprintdownload/m...>

## Appendix B: Application References

Alberta Teachers Association (2016). Can we talk? Mental health lesson plans. Canadian Mental Health Association. Retrieved from [canwetalk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/.../COOR-791-2016-03-CWT-lesson-plans.pdf](http://canwetalk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/.../COOR-791-2016-03-CWT-lesson-plans.pdf)

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Barclays Life Skills (2015). People skills: Building confidence and resilience volunteer-led lessons. The National Autistic Society, 10-14. Retrieved from <http://www.barclayslifeskills.com/teachers/lessons/building-confidence-and-resilience/>

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